

A PRACTICAL ENGLISH PHONETIC
SPELLING SYSTEM

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March 26, 1943

SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis is to present a solution to the problem of English spelling; herein I have shown the reasoning which led me to the development of the practical phonetic system herein exposed. The reasoning is divided into three parts: (a) analysis of the faults of the present system, (b) possibilities and suggestions for correction, and (c) choosing a practical and simple scheme.

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A STATE OF DISORDER.

The inconsistency of English spelling has long been a source of mental perplexity to the novice and, to the veteran, a source of perpetual irritation. In Shakespeare's time, conformity in spelling was unheard of, and a man was at liberty to transcribe his words as he so desired. Ever

<u>e</u> ve	<u>o</u> ld
<u>h</u> ere	<u>o</u> dd
<u>e</u> vent	<u>o</u> rb
<u>e</u> nd	<u>s</u> oft
<u>s</u> ilent	<u>c</u> onnect

Plate 1.

since the publication of Ben Johnson's well-known dictionary, scholars have sought uniformity in the English system of spelling. Today, we have uniformity in spelling in that most words have a definite spelling, be it logical or not. Yet, from the phonetic

point of view, English spelling is in a state of extreme disorder. These inconsistencies may well be illustrated by a man by the name of Turner, who claimed that he had a perfect right to spell his name "Phtholognyrrh," since phthisic is pronounced "tizik"; colonel, "kurnĕl"; gnat, "năt"; and myrrh, "mur."

WHAT IS WRONG WITH ENGLISH SPELLING?

The two faults of English spelling are (1) that one symbol may represent a host of different sounds (see Plate 1) and (2) that one sound is represented by more than one symbol (see Plate 2). The obvious remedy

<u>b</u> ead
<u>h</u> eed
<u>e</u> ve
<u>a</u> moeba
<u>m</u> achine
<u>s</u> eize
<u>s</u> iege

Plate 2.

for this chaotic situation would be to develop a system in which every sound would be represented by one symbol. Spanish and Italian almost satisfy this condition, and there is no reason why English could not be made to do the same. However, a many-sided problem arises when one commences to prescribe the method for a reform of the system

of spelling of the English language.

METHODS OF REFORM.

A SIMPLIFIED SPELLING SYSTEM. Many unsystematic individuals believe that words should be "written just like they sound." Suggestions have been made to modify the present system to make it somewhat more logical, dropping silent "e's," replacing "ph" by "f," and similar simplifications. This idea merits little consideration, as there would still remain phonetic irregularities. If there is to be a reform, it should be an accurate, scientific improvement.

commutator:	kōmūtātēr
dividable:	dīvīdāb'l
thereafter:	thārafter
naturalism:	nātūrālīzm

Plate 3.

WEBSTER'S SYSTEM. Using a system of orthography such as that of Webster, ambiguity and inconsistency could be reduced to nil. A scheme of this type would be most accurate, to be sure; but the unwieldy diacritical marks render the system totally impractical for everyday use by the ordinary individual. Reading and writing would be quite difficult, and the jobs of

typing and typesetting would be onerous. Some of the complications might be imagined from Plate 3.

ſ	as in <u>short</u>
dz	as in <u>jump</u>
tf	as in <u>chap</u>
ŋ	as in <u>sing</u>
ʍ	as in <u>whim</u>

Plate 4.

THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET.

Why not invent additional new symbols and discard the diacritical marks? Following this suggestion, the International Phonetic Alphabet (I. P. A.) might be employed. There are in English about forty fundamental sounds; consequently, an alphabet of about forty letters would satisfy the conditions. Here again, the scheme seems satisfactory until its practicability is considered. All of the present type would be immediately antiquated, and new type would become a necessity. All typewriters would have to be remodeled, working a tremendous hardship on typists. Such machines would be quite unwieldy, for adding about fifteen new characters to a machine would make any stenographer shudder. The cost

of such an undertaking would be phenomenal and prohibitive. In Plate 4 are shown some of the additional symbols of the I. P. A.

A PRACTICAL SYSTEM. During the past several years, I have been developing a system of practical phonetic transcription which I feel is worthy of consideration. It employs twenty-seven letters--those of the present

Vowels:	Diphthongs:	t as in tot	n as in net
ɸ as in <u>feet</u>	oi as in <u>bite</u>	g as in gig	j as in <u>yet</u>
i as in <u>fit</u>	ci as in <u>soil</u>	k as in kick	
q as in <u>bet</u>	qi as in <u>bate</u>	f as in fife	Compound Consonants:
a as in <u>fat</u>	cu as in <u>boat</u>	v as in valve	sh as in <u>ship</u>
o as in <u>not</u>	iu as in <u>music</u>	z as in fizz	zh as in <u>azure</u>
c as in <u>lost</u>	ou as in <u>house</u>	s as in <u>sauce</u>	th as in <u>thin</u>
u as in <u>put</u>		w as in wall	dh as in <u>this</u>
y as in <u>food</u>	Consonants:	h as in hall	ng as in <u>sing</u>
x as in <u>but</u>	b as in bib	r as in red	hw as in <u>what</u>
e as in <u>around</u>	p as in pop	l as in led	tsh as in <u>choice</u>
	d as in did	m as in met	dzh as in <u>jaw</u>

Plate 5.

alphabet and, in addition, the symbol "ɸ." No capital letters are used, thus eliminating rules for capitalization and need for two types of letters. ~~Each fundamental English sound is represented by one letter or a combination of~~ letters. Each fundamental English sound is represented by one letter or a combination of letters, thus attaining a simple, consistent system. The system is presented in Plate 5, and in Plate 6 is shown the transcription of Joyce Kilmer's "Trees."

THE ADOPTION OF THE PRACTICAL SYSTEM:

Why is this system superior to those already mentioned? Why is the system practical? What are its advantages? First of all, the system is phonetic, reasonably accurate for practical purposes, and employs only twenty-seven symbols. No capital letters are used, thus eliminating the evils of capitalization, as well as those of spelling. The system is entirely free

from confusing diacritical marks. Typewriters and type would not have to be changed, causing no confusion or expense.

Immediately, difficulties begin to present themselves. Will not the change be difficult and confusing? Will not present writings become antiquated, like those of Chaucer and Bede? Perhaps the easiest way to answer is to cite the case of Turkey. Turkey accomplished a similar change in

trøz

oi thingk dhat oi shal nqver sç
 e pcuem lxvli az e trç,
 e trç hyz hxnggri mouth iz prqst
 egqntst dhç erths swet flcuing brqst,
 e trç dhat luks at god cl dqi
 and lifts her lçfi ormz tu prqi;
 e trç dhat mqi in sxmer wqr
 e nqst ev robenz in her hqr;
 xpcn hyz buzem sncu haz lqin;
 hy intemetli livz with rqin.
 pcuemz or mqid boi fylz loik mç,
 bxt cunli god kan mqik e trç.
 --dzhcis kilmer

Plate 6.

1928, going from the old Arabic script symbols to the Roman characters, a transition far more difficult than that which I am suggesting. Their transition seemed difficult at first, but the change was well worth the effort.

I hope the day will come when a system, such as that

which I have proposed, will be realized. Day by day, things in the world about us are being streamlined, being made more standard, being made more scientific. Let us, then, see that the streamlining of the English spelling system will become a reality.

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